CONTENTS

12. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Community Fire Safety Action Plan 1
12.1. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Description 1
12.1.1. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Wildfire Environment 1
12.2. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Evacuations 4
12.3. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Community Meeting Summary 4
12.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects 4
12.4. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Action Plan 5

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12. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Community Fire Safety Action Plan

12.1. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Description

This planning unit includes the rural neighborhoods and settlements in unincorporated Los Angeles County of Arroyo Sequit, Little Sycamore Canyon, Upper Decker Road, Upper Encinal Road, Upper Trancas Canyon, Upper Kanan Dume Corridor, Castro Peak, Newton Canyon, Upper Latigo Canyon, Malibu Vista, and Decker-Edison, a rural road that is starting to be developed. The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit extends from Leo Carrillo State Park to Latigo Canyon. Its northern boundary loosely follows the ridgeline that borders Westlake Village and Triunfo Canyon, with Mulholland Highway the division in the northeastern corner of the unit. The southern boundaries include 2.2 miles of Pacific Ocean frontage at Leo Carrillo State Beach and the northern City of Malibu border from its westernmost end near Leo Carrillo to Latigo Canyon. The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon Planning Unit is located in unincorporated Los Angeles County. It is 37.3 miles in area.

Assets at risk in the built environment include more than 400 single-family homes, ranches, and estates. There are at least 2,000 trailers, outbuildings, and large appurtenances on these properties. Additional assets include open-space areas; national park, state conservancy, state park and beach (Leo Carrillo), and Malibu city park (Charmlee Wilderness) lands and open space; several equine farms and facilities, several artificial lakes and ponds, at least seven vineyards and wineries, many orchards, a few historic structures, two private resorts (Calamigos Ranch and Malibu Phoenix), two substance-abuse treatment facilities, two communications repeater tower sites (Bardman and Castro Peak), two day camps (Camp Bloomfield and Decker Canyon Camp), a private country club and golf course (Malibu Country Club), Los Angeles County Fire Station #72, a health spa, state corrections and forestry camp facility (Camp 13), and juvenile probation facility (Fred Miller Camp School–County of Los Angeles). Properties and homes vary in size. Parcels range from a fraction of an acre to more than 250 acres. Single-family homes currently start at $1.9 million and increase to $5 million for large estates. Undeveloped parcels start at $450,000.[1]

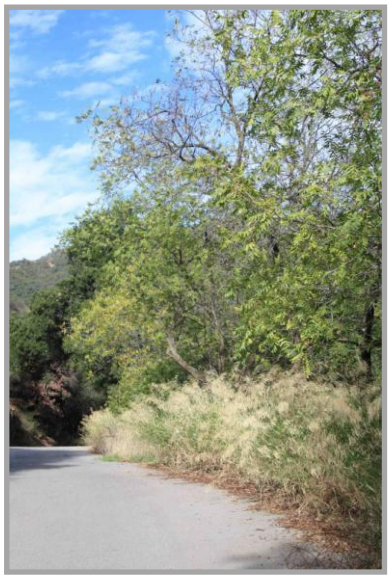
12.1.1. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Wildfire Environment

The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit is mostly undeveloped. It encompasses several Significant Ecological and cultural resources areas, including the following: Eastern Wildlife Management Corridor, seven significant watersheds (Arroyo Sequit, Decker, Trancas, Kanan, Ramírez, Escondido, and Latigo), Ramírez Canyon Environmentally Sensitive Habitat Area, Kanan Scenic Highway, oak woodlands, southern sycamore-alder riparian woodlands, pristine coastal sage scrub and chaparral habitat, mixed chaparral/oak woodland, California walnut stands, elderberry, vernal riparian habitat, and other significant botanical areas. Many sensitive, threatened, and

[1] Chris Cortazzo, Coldwell Banker Previews International, www.chriscortazzo.com (accessed March 5, 2010).

endangered plants and animals are identified in this planning unit. Numerous significant cultural resource sites are found throughout the region. Areas with high historic disturbance in this planning unit have dense populations of non-native grasses and mustards.[2,3,4] Los Angeles County Regional Planning policies for building in the area of the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit include limited grading activities, condensed and small development footprint, viewshed protection, fire protection with development of a fuel-modification plan for each new property, and monitoring for biota, cultural resources, geotechnical, and water quality protections.[5] This planning unit is considered very important by public agencies in terms of protection and acquisition of private lands for wildlife corridors and habitat, access, connectivity, easements, watershed protection, and recreation.[6]

Passive recreational opportunities include walking, jogging, bicycling, mountain biking, bird watching, wildflower and wildlife viewing, dressage, and horseback riding. Developed and private types include automobile touring, dirt biking, motor biking, pool swimming, tennis, and golf. The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon area is notorious for illegal sports car and motorcycle speeding, also known as "canyon carving," on the relatively desolate, winding, and steep roads. Law enforcement has increased patrols to curb this activity since 2007 to prevent accidents and fires.[7]



Ingress and egress is from connector roads off US Highway 101 to the north. They include State Route 23 (Decker Canyon Road) and County Highway N9 (Kanan Dume Road), both of which intersect with the east-west corridor of Mulholland Highway. Access from the south is via Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) to Mulholland Highway, Decker Canyon Road, Encinal Canyon Road, Trancas Canyon Road, Kanan Dume Road, and Latigo Canyon Road. Connectivity and condition of lateral roads in the planning unit varies. Mulholland Highway, Upper Encinal Canyon Road, and Kanan Dume Road are wide with some curves. Upper Decker Canyon, Upper Trancas Canyon, and Upper Latigo Canyon roads are very steep, narrow, with hairpin turns, have deep drop-offs, and are often subject to landslides. Roads off these six thoroughfares in the planning unit vary in condition. Some roads and drives are privately maintained and are dirt. Many have circuitous connections. Others are cul-de-sacs.

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[2] County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning (2003), General Information – Project in Kanan Dume Corridor.

[3] Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (October 2008), Project Plan – Draft Dirt Mulholland action plan – Coastal slope trail – Kanan Dume Road to Latigo Canyon Road segment.

[4] D. Waldecker (October 12, 2007), Environmental Scientist, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Natural Environmental Study Report: Leo Carrillo North Beach Cabins Project.

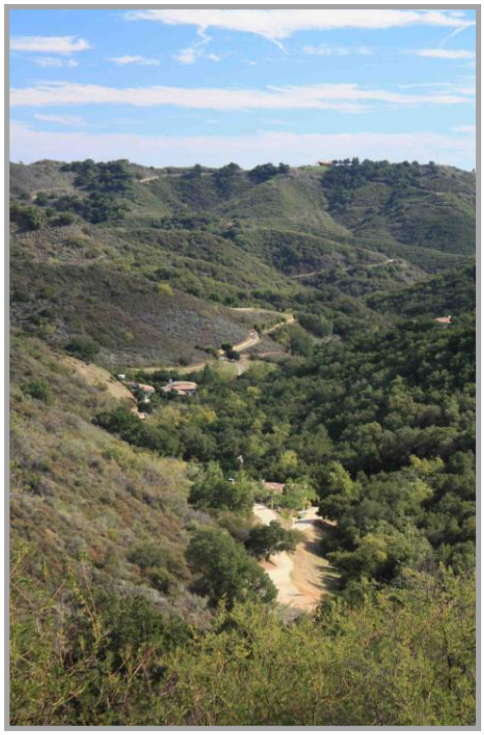
[5] County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning (2003), General Information – Project in Kanan Dume Corridor.

[6] Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (October 2008), Project Plan – Draft Dirt Mulholland action plan – Coastal slope trail – Kanan Dume Road to Latigo Canyon Road segment.

[7] L. Michaelson (2007), "Cops come down hard on 'canyon carving'," *Topanga Messenger*.

CAL FIRE designated the entire Santa Monica Mountains region as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone, including the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon area.

The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon Planning Unit has a history of wildfires with an increase in frequency of incidents the last 20 years: Potrero (November 1930); 30,000-acre Latigo complex (1935); Sequit 57 (July 13, 1940); 15,000-acre Woodland Hills 65 (November 6, 1943) with 150 homes destroyed in the burn area; Houston (November 17, 1951); 16,400-acre Newton complex (December 28, 1956) with 100 homes destroyed in the burn area; Zuma (December 2, 1958); 18,000-acre Liberty (November 28, 1958) with 100 homes destroyed in the burn area; Latigo (October 30, 1967); unnamed (September 5, 1970); 28,201-acre Wright (September 25, 1970) with 403 homes destroyed in the burn area and ten fatalities; Carlisle (November 15, 1977); Trancas (September 23, 1978); 25,586-acre Kanan (October 23, 1978) with 200 homes destroyed in the burn area and two fatalities; unnamed (November 20, 1980); 43,090-acre Dayton Canyon (October 9, 1982) with 74 homes destroyed in the burn area; Decker (August 7, 1983); 6,567-acre Decker (October 14, 1985); Sherwood (June 30, 1985); Archery (October 18, 1991); Encinal (November 24, 1991); Carlisle (July 15, 1992); 30,000-acre Green Meadow (October 25, 1993) with 24 homes destroyed in the burn area; Kanan (August 5, 1994); Decker (September 3, 1995); Encinal (June 4, 1996); Charmlee (July 1, 1996); Decker (April 24, 1997); School (August 13, 1997); Encinal (August 22, 1998); Trancas (September 2, 1998); NPS Truck (July 29, 2000); West PCH (April 10, 2002); Backbone (May 26, 2002); Lofty Kanan (August 2, 2003); Latigo Canyon (February 8, 2006); Tunnel (June 18, 2007); Mulholland (January 17, 2008); Westlake (May 1, 2008); 4,709-acre Corral (November 24, 2007) with 50 homes destroyed in the burn area; and Kanan (September 27, 2008).[8,9]



Homes in the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon Planning Unit have a variable age-class. Older structures tend to be wooden. Newer structures generally are constructed of stucco, plaster, or masonry. Many homes, regardless of age, have wooden decks, fences, or outbuildings. Mature, lush, and tall ornamental vegetation is found around structures throughout the entire unit. Many older homes have been remodeled. Utilities are aboveground. Many farms, ranches, and homes are gated. Part of Newton Canyon is gated. Most structures in the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit are not retrofitted to current California WUI Fire and Building Standards.[10]

There are two municipal water suppliers for the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon Planning Unit. Leo Carrillo State Beach and Park receive their water from Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29.[11] Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (LVMWD) services the remainder of the unit.[12] Mandatory water conservation

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[8] Robert S. Taylor, Biogeographer / Fire GIS Specialist, National Park Service, personal communication, February 12, 2010.

[9] Mike Davis (1998), "The Case for Letting Malibu Burn." In *Ecology of Fear* (New York: Henry Holt), pp. 93–147.

[10] State of California, Building Standards Commission, www.bsc.ca.gov (accessed February 8, 2010).

[11] Los Angeles County Waterworks District No. 29 (October 31, 2009), Map [Data].

[12] Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), District Map [Data], www.lvmwd.com/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=838.

and enforcement measures were established in 2009. The district has one emergency 9,500-acre-foot back-up reservoir.[13] There are few subdivisions in the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit. Water subscribers to LVMWD are required to pay for pipeline extensions and hook-ups to their properties from the water company trunk line. The design of the existing delivery system does not provide adequate pressure for fire department use.[14] Many property owners in the area instead rely on individual wells.

The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit is very large. First responders may come from various fire stations: Los Angeles County Fire Station #72 is located on Decker Canyon Road. Station #99 is on Encinal Bluffs near PCH and Lower Decker Canyon Road. Station #71 is located at Point Dume. Station #88 is on Malibu Road.

12.2. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Evacuations

Possible impediments to emergency ingress and egress include downed power lines, trees, traffic collisions, locked gates, and poor road conditions. The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon unit has multiple venues where large groups of people convene. There are many large and small domestic animals in this unit. Evacuation plans should include all these considerations and be coordinated with community emergency service providers. A few spots have the potential to be utilized as staging areas.

12.3. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Community Meeting Summary

The Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon community meeting was held in "The Atrium" at Calamigos Ranch on November 9, 2009. Four residents and three non-residents attended.

The following assets at risk were identified at the community meeting. These can be seen on Map II.12-1 at the end of this document.

FIGURE II.12-1. COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS AT RISK

- AT&T site (satellite site)
- Calamigos Ranch
- Fred Miller Camp School
- Castro Peak
- Los Angeles County Fire Station #72
- Arroyo Sequit
- Camp 13
- Charmlee Park
- Decker Camp
- Rocky Oaks

12.3.1. Community-Identified Potential Projects

The following items are community-identified projects from the community meeting. Residents were encouraged to "think big," and not be concerned about project cost or property ownership for the project brainstorming process. Following the brainstorming, residents prioritized projects based on which were most realistic and most important. These projects can be located on Map II.12-1 at the end of this document.

[13] Las Virgenes Municipal Water District (2010), www.lvmwd.com.

[14] Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (October 2008), Project Plan – Draft Dirt Mulholland action plan – Coastal slope trail – Kanan Dume Road to Latigo Canyon Road segment.

FIGURE II.12-2. SYCAMORE CANYON – UPPER LATIGO CANYON COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED PROJECTS

IDENTIFIED ITEM DESCRIPTION	PROPOSED PROJECT CATEGORY	PRIORITY RANK
Better radio communications for emergency services in dead zones	Emergency Preparedness	1
Hydrants/water throughout for fire protection	Water	1
More firefighters per engine/station	Fire Protection	1
Training program for residential home defense from wildfire/CERT training	Emergency Preparedness	2
Emergency wildfire communication notification system for residents	Emergency Preparedness	2
Cooperative hazardous fuel-reduction program	Fuel Reduction	2
Bury power lines	Risk Reduction	3
Create safe zones where they do not exist	Evacuation	3
Roadside hazardous fuel reduction, private and public	Fuel Reduction	
Guard rails on steep canyon roads	Risk Reduction	
Arson watch program	Risk Reduction	
Generators for water tanks	Water	
Incentive for local water storage	Water	

12.4. Sycamore Canyon – Upper Latigo Canyon Action Plan

The following projects are the initial priorities for community action for the Sycamore Canyon–Upper Latigo Canyon Planning Area.

- Form a local Fire Safe Council (FSC) or join with other nearby FSCs. This organizational structure will facilitate community preparedness for wildfire throughout the local communities. Work with the California Fire Safe Council to create a FSC that will best accommodate and enable this area.
- Ensure that at least one team from each homeowner's association (HOA) or neighborhood undergoes Community Emergency Response (CERT) training through the Los Angeles County Fire Department.[15] This is the venue to begin organizing locally for evacuation planning, in cooperation with local law enforcement and the fire department.
- Implement a hazard tree removal/thinning program through a FSC, HOA, or other community organization, in priority order:
    - Along main evacuation routes, especially localized areas of Mulholland Drive, Decker Canyon Road, Encinal Canyon Road, Kanan Dune Road, and Latigo Canyon Road.
    - Along the spur roads to these main evacuation roads,
    - Near homes, especially trees that threaten more than one home,
    - Trees in or near power lines.
- Residents reduce urban fuels in the home ignition zone based on the Conservation Principles and Best Management Practices outlined in Chapters 1, 4, and 5 of this CWPP. Fuels maintenance should be a routine and ongoing practice for all homes and landscapes in the Santa Monica Mountains. This includes: ensuring structures are resistant to heat and embers, maintaining all vegetation "from the house out," and removing anything in this zone that might ignite and spread fire.

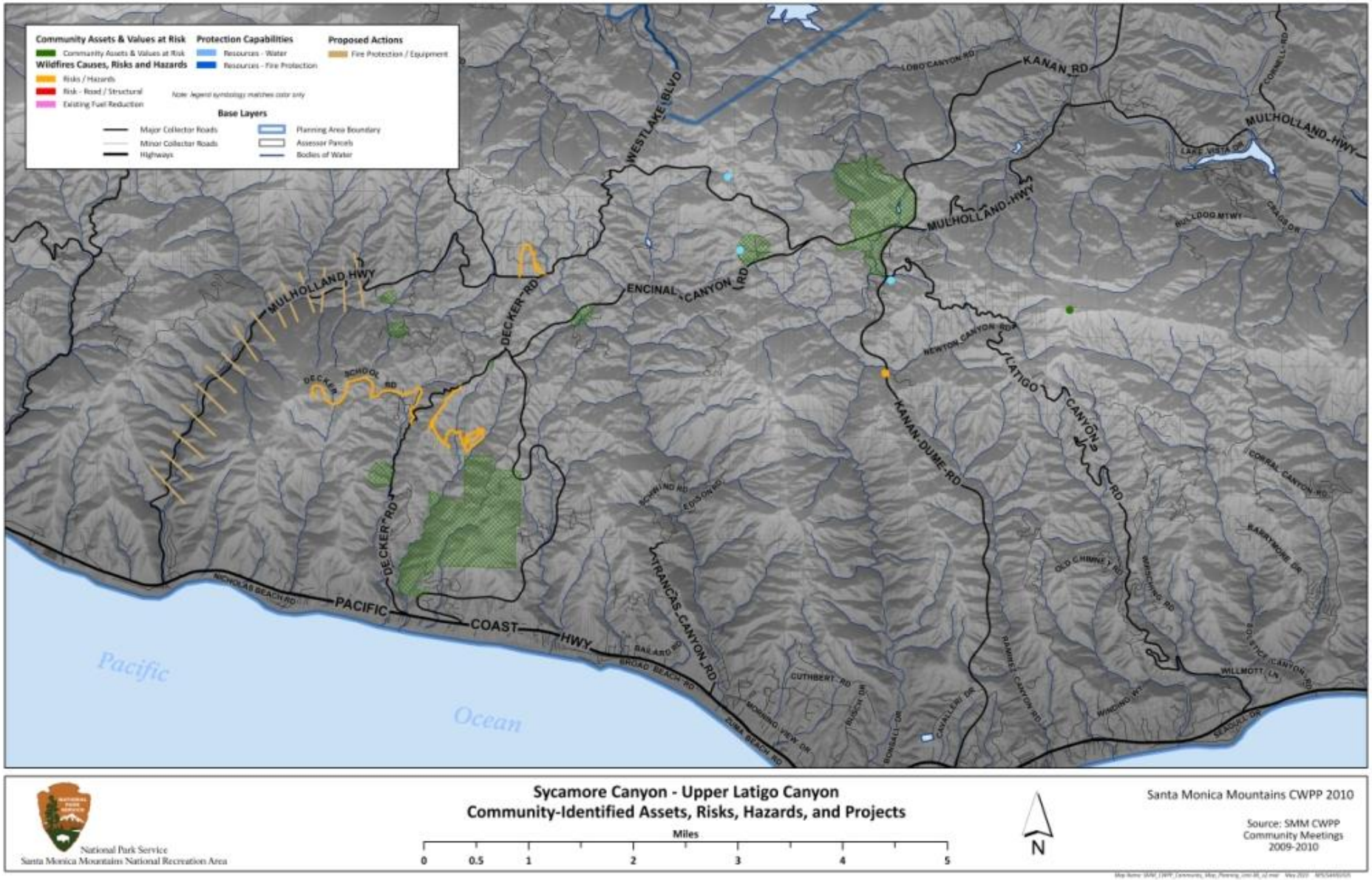
[15] http://fire.lacounty.gov/ProgramsEvents/PECERT.asp

- Work through a new FSC, existing HOA, or other community organization to begin a local community education and preparedness campaign. Include community education on pool pumps, generators, and home fire-preparedness equipment.
- Work with law enforcement and Los Angeles County Fire Department through a FSC, HOA, or other neighborhood-level association to develop a local evacuation plan. Efforts should be made to ensure that local gates are open or accessible during Red Flag conditions.

- Work through a new FSC, existing HOA, or other community organization to undertake a more detailed analysis of risks and hazards in this area *(see Chapter 7)*.
- Work through HOAs or FSC to educate residents on the need to keep ingress and egress/evacuation routes clear. Residents need to understand the dangers involved in imprudent parking or long-term street storage of unused vehicles. Because natural disasters can strike at any time, key evacuation ingress/egress routes must be kept free of parked vehicles, especially trailers and other large objects that are difficult to move quickly. Trash cans and other items should be kept off the roadway and out of key turnout/passing areas.[16] A neighborhood-organizing project would include creating off-street parking where it is limited. Neighbors can work together to help each other stay in compliance.

[16] The law in Los Angeles County states that trash cans can only be on the street after 5 pm of the day preceding, and until 8 pm on the day of waste collection.

***MAP II.12-1. SYCAMORE CANYON – UPPER LATIGO CANYON: COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED ASSETS, RISKS, HAZARDS, AND PROJECTS*[17]**



National Park Service
Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

Sycamore Canyon - Upper Latigo Canyon
Community-Identified Assets, Risks, Hazards, and Projects

Miles: 0 0.5 1 2 3 4 5

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Santa Monica Mountains CWPP 2010

Source: SMM CWPP Community Meetings 2009-2010

[17] This map prints best at 11x17. Visit to www.forevergreenforestry.com/smmcwpp_pub.html to download a print version.